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ABSTRACT

Increased interaction between people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds demands new approaches to instruction in intercultural communication. Typically, four models of cross-cultural training are utilized to provide individuals with understanding of different cultural styles: the practical-functional approach, focusing on specific skill attainment; the cognitive-didactic approach, based on formal information transmission; the affective-personal approach, concerned with increasing self-awareness; and the author's preferred method, the experiential approach, an eclectic method which draws techniques from other models. Simulation games and exercises based on the experiential approach such as cross-cultural simulations, labeling tasks, cooperation exercises, personal inventory development, and non-evaluative listening experiences are outlined. (KS)

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AN EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH TO INSTRUCTION IN INTERCULTURAL COMMUNICATION

David Warren and Peter Adler

Increased interaction between people of different ethnic and cultural backgrounds demands new approaches to instruction in intercultural communication. Although cognitive development continues to be the primary thrust of most instruction, non-formal methods are becoming increasingly useful as a means of stimulating interest and changing attitudes. Many of these approaches can be adapted and modified from the field of cross-cultural training, that is, processes in use by international and educational organizations committed to cross-cultural exchange.

Success in cross-cultural encounters has been attributed to language learning (Smalley[1]), cultural xenophilia (Perlmutter[2]; Pool[3]), situational factors (Smith et. al.[4]; Suedfeld[5], Gullahorn and Gallahorn[6]), and intercultural communication skills (Hall[7]; Hall and Whyte[8]; Brien and David[9].) Though few studies have focused on the specific impact of cross-cultural training, most individuals who enter into second culture experiences undergo some form of training. Traditionally, the individual going abroad in conjunction with an organization is given some form of orientation prior to his or her departure. Sophisticated advances have been made in recent years in the area of training. Many of

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these can be useful to the instructor of intercultural communication.

Cross-cultural training can be defined as programs, projects, and activities designed to help members of one culture interact and communicate effectively in another culture. Cross-cultural training seeks, through different methodological approaches, to increase the understanding, effectiveness, and skill of the student. This often necessitates both cognitive and affective growth where the training is related to "real life" situations. In general, most training programs initiated by international organizations incorporate the following goals and objectives:

1. To provide the individual with information on other cultures.
2. To provide specific occupational skills where the individual is to work within another culture.
3. To prepare the person to accept and be tolerant of values, attitudes, and beliefs that are different from his or her own.
4. To provide the individual with specific language skills.
5. To provide the person with appropriate behavioral responses in situations where the characteristics of the other culture prevail.
6. To prepare the person to understand, anticipate, and cope with the frustrations of culture shock.
7. To provide the person with understandings of his or her own culture and the problems caused by cultural bias.
8. To help the individual develop an orientation towards the cross-cultural experience which will make the experience itself enjoyable, interesting, and broadening.

Cross-cultural training includes different methodologies and formats which can be utilized by the experienced trainer

in a variety of ways. Each program will employ different techniques designed to promote interaction and communication between people of different backgrounds. The length and content of training will differ according to the needs of the group. Individuals going abroad for educational exchange or volunteer work will require a different kind of training than those who are interested in sub-cultural interactions in American society. The nature of the intended experience generally dictates the kind of overall preparation that is needed and the techniques to be employed. As in teaching, all forms of cross-cultural training are dependent on the sensitivity and skill of the trainer. The trainer, in turn, has a range of possibilities from which to draw together a program. Four of these models bear mentioning. Of the four, the authors lay stress on the experiential approach, the most useful and eclectic for instructors of intercultural communication.

Four Models of Cross-Cultural Training

1. THE PRACTICAL-FUNCTIONAL APPROACH

   This model of cross-cultural training attempts to prepare the individual for specific, practical tasks which are to be performed in the second culture. Generally, such training is geared to role development in which certain occupational objectives are to be accomplished, i.e., community development, health and nutrition, family planning, etc. In training, considerable emphasis is placed on understanding the social, political and economic conditions of the cultures involved. The primary

thrust is to build competency and expertise in specific skill areas and the training, in turn, is usually supervised by experts who test and evaluate the trainees. Training of Peace Corps Volunteers and AID officials is representative of this approach.

2. THE COGNITIVE-DIDACTIC APPROACH

The cognitive-didactic approach represents the most traditional approach to cross-cultural training. In general, this model is based on information-transmission in which trainees are given lectures and readings about the new culture which they are expected to retain, utilize, and expand during the initial phases of the sojourn. Training staff and experts in particular knowledge areas usually establish the overall goals and decide what information is to be imparted. Although a traditional and somewhat simple approach, sophisticated techniques have been developed by trainers and teachers using this model. "Cultural Assimilators," a sophisticated critical incident approach (Fiedler, Mitchell and Triandis[10]), and other innovative methods of imparting information have been successfully used by agencies and institutions engaged in overseas work.

3. THE AFFECTIVE-PERSONAL APPROACH

The affective-personal approach is based on self-awareness, the primary assumption being that a good understanding of one's personal attitudes, values, beliefs, and world view will effectively set the stage

for successful encounters in the second culture. Sensitivity to behaviors and emotional expressions in the second culture are emphasized and specific techniques are often drawn from materials in Sensitivity Training, Encounter Groups, and T-Group theory. The affective-personal approach, though useful, has limitations in that the model grows out of cultural identity needs that may be unique to Americans. Encounter groups and sensitivity training do not easily translate into the context of most other cultures without modifications that remove the Western bias of emphasizing the expression of strong emotions.

4. THE EXPERIENTIAL APPROACH

This style of training, the most recent to emerge, is essentially eclectic in that it draws on specific methods and techniques from the other models. It differs from the others in that the primary emphasis is on the individual taking responsibility for his or her learning. Experiential preparation attempts to create the conditions in which a person can "learn how to learn" and how to continue learning beyond the setting of the training program. The experiential approach utilizes, for the most part, semi-structured, open-minded exercises in which there are not necessarily correct or incorrect answers to any one problem. Emphasis is placed on the individual experimenting with various approaches to any one problem encountered in the cross-cultural situation.

The experiential approach, like the affective-personal model, places high value on trainees reaching insights about themselves. Unlike that approach, however, experiential trainers make no great distinction between affective and cognitive development, viewing both as instrumental to learning. The exercises which follow serve as excellent examples of the experiential approach.

Simulation Games and Exercises in Intercultural Communication

Simulation games and exercises are "tools" to be utilized in helping students explore, expand, and deepen their understanding of intercultural communication. As Shelton[11] points out, there is a significant difference between authentic learning and simply going through the motions of an exercise. In the first instance, for example, students actually experience the full range of feelings and thoughts that would normally be present when entering a new and different culture or discover the difficulty of listening carefully to views they do not share. In the second instance, students merely carry out an "exercise" with efficiency and good feelings. The instructor has much to do with creating and maintaining an atmosphere conducive to meaningful growth and learning.

The way games and exercises are structured is an important consideration if maximum growth and learning is to be achieved in the classroom. The experiential approach is inductive, i.e., students first "experience" the exercise or simulation game and only afterwards are the objectives and concepts to be learned

elicited from the students. This approach permits students to experience the exercise cognitively and emotionally without prior knowledge of what they are "supposed" to be learning. We have found that this approach often results in students taking considerably greater initiative and responsibility in the accomplishment of intended objectives.

The following games and exercises have been selected on the basis of the writers' experience with them. They all meet two criteria: (1) they are functional, i.e., they effectively facilitate the intended educational objective, and (2) most students are highly motivated by them.

BaFa BaFa: A Cross-Cultural Simulation

Objective: To simulate the basic experience of entering a new culture.

General Procedure:

1. Students are divided into two groups or "Cultures." Once all of the members understand and feel comfortable with their new culture, observers are exchanged. After a fixed time, the observers return to their respective groups and report on what they saw. Based on the information provided by the observer, each group tries to develop hypotheses about the most effective way to interact with the other culture. Afterwards, each person takes a turn at trying to interact with the other culture, while their own culture proceeds as normal.

2. The simulation works best if there are two rooms--one for each culture.

3. The minimum number of students at which the simulation can be successfully played is twelve (12) - six (6) in each group. The maximum workable number is about forty (40).

4. There should be two directors -- one for each culture.

5. The materials needed to play BaFa BaFa can be constructed at home in one evening.

6. One should allow a minimum of three (3) hours for the simulation.

Background Notes:

BaFa BaFa was originally prepared by a group of consultants to the U.S. Navy in order to give American military personnel abroad a deeper sensitivity to other cultures. Since that time, the simulation has been used successfully with Americans, Asians, Pacific Islanders, Europeans, and Latin Americans and with people of different ages, occupations, and educational levels.

Although structured and detailed, the simulation can be modified and tailored to the needs of particular groups. It is a useful tool for those who have had a great deal of cross-cultural experience as well as for those who have never lived outside of their own culture. It is expecially relevant to those who are interested in cross-cultural communication.

It is highly recommended that one experience this simulation before attempting to lead it.

A director's manual and a kit which services 18 - 36 students is available from: Simile II, P. O. Box 1023, La Jolla, Ca. 92037.

The Label Exercise

Objective: To show how we often attach labels to people, behave toward them accordingly, and thereby limit our perceptions and restrict communication.

Procedure: Choose a variety of labels to categorize people. Some samples could be:

Tell me I'm right
Ignore me
Treat me as a sex object or Tell me I'm sexy
Treat me as a helpless person with nothing worthwhile to say
Interrupt me
Flatter me
Criticize me
Tell me I'm wrong

Type or print the labels on self-adhesive stickers (e.g., Avery index stickers) with enough stickers for all participants.

Divide participants into groups of six (6). Tell groups they are to engage in a discussion for ten (10) minutes on a social topic, e.g., "Social Life in Hawaii," at the end of which time there will be a large group discussion on the topic.

Tell the group that during the discussion each member will have a piece of instruction on his/her forehead for other members to follow. (Each member in the small group gets a different label.) No one should ask anyone else what his/her label says or peek through mirrors to find out. Simply move into the discussion topic and act accordingly.

At the end of ten (10) minutes, have each member convey to the group how he/she felt the others were acting toward them. After impressions are checked out and confirmed, then the person may peel off the label and see what it says.

When each member has had a chance to see his/her label, return to a large group discussion. See how other groups experienced the exercise. How might this exercise apply to situations one experiences in real life?

Identify words used, nonverbal behavior, emotional reactions.

Concepts: Stereotyping, prejudice, communication barriers.

Cooperative Squares Exercise

Purpose: To explore conditions necessary--or desirable--for cooperation. To experience reactions to "competitive" and "cooperative" conditions.

Procedure: Have participants divide into groups of five. Anyone not in a group becomes an observer. Take observers aside and instruct them to look for:

a. Breaking of rules. How? Under what conditions?
b. Different forms of communication, including nonverbal communication.
c. Reactions that show embarrassment, frustration, anger, stress, etc.
d. Reactions to frustration.

Observers are not to talk or signal to participants during the exercise.

Pass out to each group an envelope containing a set of Cooperative Squares. Answer questions about the instructions but do not let the groups discuss the problem or possible strategies. Instructions:

a. No member may speak.
b. No member may ask another member for a card or in any way signal how a card is to be placed.
c. No member may give a card to another member.
d. Members may, however, take cards from other members.

When groups are ready give the signal to begin. Resist the temptation to help the groups, as some degree of stress and frustration is an important part of the learning experience.

When groups are done, have members discuss the experience, with feedback from observers.

a. What rules were difficult to follow? Why?
b. What kinds of behavior interfered with completing the task?
c. How did you feel when you needed a piece and could not get or keep it?
d. How did you feel when someone held a piece and did not see the solution?
e. How did you, personally, react to frustration? By giving up? Cheating? "Letting George do it?"
f. What kind of a climate helped? Hindered?
g. What would be some conditions necessary or desirable for cooperation?

Re-convene as a large group and have each of the small groups share their discussion with the rest. This can lead into discussions on concepts of cooperation/competition and their varying degrees in different cultures.

Personal Inventory Exercise

Objective: To have each individual realize the extent to which he carries his own culture upon his person. Also, to build community.

Statement: We all tend to carry our culture and values with us. They are reflected in the clothes we wear, the way we fix our hair, and the

distance at which we feel comfortable talking to someone else. It is perhaps most manifest in what we carry in our pockets and purses.

Procedure: In this exercise you ask individuals to form small groups (up to 10) and ask each small group to form a circle. You then ask each individual to empty the contents of his pocket or her purse in front of him/her. (If an individual refuses, don't force him as you may be liable for an invasion of privacy suit!) Once each individual has his/her items spread out, you can proceed in one of two ways:

a. The most commonly used method is to ask each individual to explain why he carries each item with him. (Particularly interesting are the contents of wallets, including credit cards, amount of money carried, and pictures.)

b. A second approach is to issue each individual a number of sheets of blank paper equal to the number of people in the group minus one. Without talking to one another, ask each individual to write a brief statement about each member in the group, based solely on the personal inventory spread before that member. When completed the statements are given to the appropriate person. One then proceeds around the group explaining one's own inventory.

Variation: If on a weekend outing, have individuals spread out the contents of their over-night bags. Look for categories of items related to entertainment. Are they solely for the individual or for group interaction? (E.g., a book vs. a guitar.)

Non-evaluative Listening Exercise[12]

Objective: To develop skill in initially withholding evaluations in order to more clearly understand what another person is saying.

Procedure:

1. Divide students into groups of 4 - 6 so that there is a heterogeneous mix of sex, race, and ethnic backgrounds.

2. Select one of the following topics which the group members are divided on both pro and con, or select your own controversial topic.

Suggested Topics:

a. The need for a One World Government
b. The right of a woman to have an abortion
c. The legalization of marijuana
d. The legalization of prostitution
e. The need for Women's Liberation
f. The wisdom of pre-marital sex

3. Rules for group discussion:
   a. Each person in the group should voice her/his opinion on the topic at least once.
   b. Before any member of the group may speak, she/he must state to the previous speaker's satisfaction what the other person has just been saying before any reply is allowed.
   c. All the group members are to act as monitors and may intervene if they feel the rules have been violated.

Variation: Invite people from different cultures or ethnic backgrounds to participate in this exercise.

Conclusion

Simulation games and experiential exercises have three significant advantages for academic instruction. First, they provide a unique way of motivating students and creating a sense of curiosity. When gaming methods are carefully selected and appropriately adapted to the classroom situation, they often create positive attitudes towards the subject matter being taught. Students who "experience" the material being taught tend to become actively involved in their own learning processes. When this occurs, the instructor can de-emphasize the use of external rewards such as grades, since natural interest in the subject matter generates its own pedagogical momentum. The gaming device, however, must be appropriate to the subject. A boring game or exercise is just as educationally poor as a boring test or lecture.

A second advantage of the experiential approach is that it allows the student to freely experiment with the typical problems encountered in the cross-cultural situation. Students who can begin to take personal risks in simulation games will have a far easier time negotiating the culture shock process implicit in the cross-cultural experience. The game is a "safe" place for such personal experimentation since any degree of failure will not result in being fired from a job, a loss of friends, or even a low course grade. The classroom becomes a unique laboratory for acquiring valuable experience, knowledge, and skill that can later be applied in real life situations.

Finally, the experiential approach attempts to instill in students the idea that intercultural communication is a uniquely creative process, one in which there is no single "right answer" to any given situation. The experience, knowledge and skill gained in the classroom contributes to a sound foundation from which students can more confidently approach communication with people from different cultural and ethnic backgrounds. When students begin to assume the responsibility for their own education, either in the classroom or in the cross-cultural situation, the objectives of the experiential approach have been achieved.

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